

THE CHILDREN'S COUNTRY HOLIDAY FUND.

The children who benefit by this Fund call it by another name: "The Children's Country Holiday *Fun*." I have just finished reading 901 letters telling about the Fun. They were from Fourth Standard children, and the writing of them is evidently as great a pleasure as the reading of them. "I write you this welcome letter"; "I took the pleasure to write this letter to you very much."

The most noticeable feature of this set of letters is the number of thoughtful questions that were asked: "Why did not the tide come in the same time every day?" "Why are plums different colours?" "Why are the lower leaves of a foxglove larger than the upper ones?" I also want to have an answer to this next question: Why is it that rabbits in Australia do not sit up on their hind legs like English rabbits?

When I was in the village school this week, I heard some admirable answers. Standards II. and III. had "question papers," and each child wrote down a question to which he or she wanted an answer, then all the papers were handed to the Mistress. One question was: "How are bricks made?"—"On Saturday you must go to Mr. N.'s yard, and on Monday you can tell us all how bricks are made." Another was: "Why do the leaves fall off?"—"Bring in some twigs with leaves on them to-morrow and we will find out together." Other children were sent to the dictionary and some to books.

To return to the letters. I suppose there is nobody who knows more details of pig-killing than I do, for I have read at least a hundred graphic accounts, and most of them were written by girls. It was a relief to read a boy's brief description of a chicken's death: "They take a long breath, then go mad, then death takes place." While the girls were at the butcher's, the boys went to fairyland, where they saw "A frog spit fire"; "A deaf adder, and on its back was written 'No man or bee shall pass by me'"; "The stars come out

and form in sevens." There are some delightful notes about the sky: "The little clouds looked like little lambs following each other"; "But what seemed strange, the rainbow was not in the clouds but in the air, for I could see trees beyond"; "The sky at night has all kinds of colours, and it looks very nice and dear"; "When you are looking at the sunset you fall into a kind of daydream thinking that you are going with it into a kind of Paradise"; and (take notice!) "I saw some big berries, but we must be careful of the germs; one day a germ crawled on my lip." This next remark is cryptic, but I feel sure it is meant to be comforting: "Ozone is ailing for invalids."

There is a game called "Solomon's Buts"; it was invented in the days when only Biblical games were allowed on Sunday. The leader said the beginning of one of Solomon's proverbs and a mark was gained by the player who could guess the thought contained in the last half of it, following the *but*. A similar game might be made from the children's letters; it should be called "Compensations." Here are a few examples: "It was a little church, *but* a long sermon"; "I passed many days examining birds and flowers, *but* fruit, with which I am so familiar, did not want examining"; "The lady was miserable, *but* the place was nice"; "There were no streets, *but* plenty of bats"; "There were no strikes on down there, *but* a large number of wasps." I should think this last writer will grow up with sound views on peaceful picketting!

The oft-repeated refrain in one girl's letter is: "I held the baby"; and she tells us "he was such a pretty baby, I saw a robin looking at him one day." Can this following short story be beaten?—"I had a severe temptation. The lady was under the tree when I came down."

I wish I had time to copy more from these delightful letters, but here is the last batch: "I look back to days in the country, it makes me feel glad." "I shall have the pleasantest thoughts in my mind till the time comes again." "Dear

Madam, as many waves as are in the sea, so many kisses I send to thee." "I close with kind remembrances of my holiday." "This is my letter."

HARRIET SMEETON.

EVENING ON THE GREAT OUSE.

All day long the wind has been sweeping up the river, making miniature waves on its usually smooth surface, and tossing the reeds to and fro, till their feathery heads nearly dipped in the water. Now, as the sun sets in the crimson west, all is still, the wind has suddenly dropped, the water is placid again. The reeds sway gently, for they are restless creatures, and can never keep quite still; chatterers, too, they are, and always seem to have endless secrets to whisper to anyone who will listen to them.

Some little pink clouds, floating calm and still in the bright clear sky, are caught and reflected back again by the almost equally clear water. The grass and rushes along the river banks, the small grey willows, looking as if some one had sprinkled their leaves with flour, the tall spikes of purple loosestrife, all are faithfully reproduced in the looking-glass at their feet.

The cattle come streaming across the meadows and stand at the water's edge to cool their feet after the long, hot day, flicking off the teasing flies as they lazily chew the cud.

Presently, as the sun sinks lower, the sky changes from crimson to pale yellow, then to a faint shade of green, then again to a clear grey, tinged with purple.

The reed warblers call to each other with their harsh little cry. A water-rat pops out from the bank and disappears under the surface with a splash. All else is still as the boat glides smoothly along, the oars dipping gently in the water.

Now and then the river widens into a small bay, so covered with water-lily leaves as to look like a green tablecloth, with here and there a yellow flower like a raised pattern on the

cloth. Here are four great willow trees standing up tall and straight to their full height; here is another leaning right out from the bank and bathing its dusty-looking leaves in the water.

Soon the boat glides into the mill-pool, and the sound of the rushing weir grows louder and louder. An empty punt, drawn up at one side of the pool, catches the glow from the west and looks almost as if it were painted red. Right in the middle of the pond a small clump of dock stands up stiffly in shallow water. The ducks, who usually disport themselves here in the daytime, have evidently gone to bed for the night. In a corner, where the water is deep, a patient angler sits quietly in his punt, looking as if he had always been there—always *would* be there, whenever one chose to go and look for him. Here and there the sharply-pointed leaves of the arrowhead form small regiments, standing guard over the delicate flowers, each with its three rounded, creamy petals and crimson centre. Now and then a fish jumps high in the air after the circling gnats and falls back again with a splash.

At one side of the pool, and on rising ground, stands the mill, a collection of old wooden buildings, leaning this way and that, and yet with a certain look of solidity about them. No two lines of the walls or roof are parallel, each part seems to have been built quite independently of every other part. The eaves at one end run suddenly backwards, as if they had been unevenly sliced away; the gables are all at different heights, and none are straight; the doors hang on crazy hinges, and look as if they could not possibly open or shut. Parts of the building have been tarred, other parts look grey and weather-stained; but colour is supplied by the patches of green lichen which finds a home on the damp wood, and by the dull-red tiles on the roof partly overgrown by moss.

The miller's house stands close to the mill, a medley of gables of all shapes and sizes, but built of brick for the most part. One gable end is whitewashed, another close beside it is grey stone, a third rising up behind it is a dull weathered

yellow. The tiles look like an artist's palette, daubed with colours at random, but chiefly warm tones of browns and reds, grey and dull yellow. Gradually the picture fades as the twilight deepens. The shadows grow blacker and blacker, the silvery light of the moon takes the place of the sunset glow, bats take the place of the swallows, darting and wheeling about in the air just as quickly and gracefully as the little summer visitors.

Turning back towards St. Ives, the boat drifts slowly down with the current. Lights twinkle from the windows of various small house-boats moored to the banks, or stream out in a broad path from an open door. The slender spire of the church points up into the clear sky, a second one seeming to stretch right across the river, so perfect is the reflection.

Everything is still and peaceful, even the reeds have almost stopped whispering; 'tis an evening to remember in the years to come, when life may be cast in less pleasant places.

W. T.

A TEN MINUTES' PAPER

WRITTEN FOR THE POETRY CLUB, SCALE HOW.

(To be followed by extracts, read by members.)

William Makepeace Thackeray was born in Calcutta on July 18th, 1811. He came to England very young, and was educated at Charterhouse and Trinity College, Cambridge. He went abroad upon leaving college, and learnt, as he said, "to order a dinner in every language in Europe." At this time he also saw men and cities, and acquired that knowledge of human nature which he has immortalised. He returned to England, and whilst he was nominally reading for the Bar, he was seriously writing articles and drawing sketches. Everyone knows how seriously he took himself as a draughtsman, and it is a fortunate thing for English literature that Dickens

refused to allow him to illustrate *David Copperfield*, etc. In the first place, Dickens would have suffered; in the second place, the world at large would have been deprived of Thackeray as a writer, an infinitely more valuable person than Thackeray as an artist. However, he contented himself by illustrating his own books, and much enjoyed the task. His first effort of importance was "The Yellow Plush Papers." These he contributed to *Frazer's Magazine* under the name of Michael Angelo Titmarsh.

"The Book of Snobs," his next book, is a collection of short stories drawn from the experiences of his young manhood. These were not pleasant. He was a good deal alone, and knocked about amongst a somewhat penurious and sordid society. But he was a hale and hearty Yorkshireman, and came out of this ordeal unscathed, and the richer for a thorough contempt of what he considered a besetting sin of his day—snobbishness. He defined it as "a mean admiration," and laid merciless siege to it. "The Book of Snobs" he views almost as a "book with a purpose," and it was from this work that he gained himself the reputation of a cynic, from which he never entirely escaped. The excuse for this misconception on the public's part perhaps arose from the fact that Thackeray created first his immortal villains. His heroes, though not less immortal, came later, and the public eye had already been taken. Mr. Chesterton suggests that this healing and humanising may have been due to his marriage, to which, however, there was a very tragic sequel. Mrs. Thackeray had to go to an asylum, and Thackeray said a very fine thing: "I would do it over again." Now surely a cynic is a pessimist, and I cannot help feeling he must be an egoist; but from this anecdote we cannot gather that Thackeray was self-centred. He was gloriously genial—his face tells one that much—he was thoroughly healthy and vigorous in his treatment of vice, and he believed in virtue. His whole object in what is considered the most cynical of his books, "Vanity Fair," was to show how even foolish

virtue is better than wise wickedness. Mr. Chesterton says of this book: "The mere title of 'Vanity Fair' was certainly an inspiration; for it is both the strength and weakness of the book that it produces on the mind (I might even say on the nerves) the same impression of mixed voices and almost maddening competition as a crowded square on market day. The force and fault of Thackeray was always to be irrelevant; but here irrelevancy rises till it reaches to a sort of deafening distraction. Everyone in this tale is filled with a futile energy. Many critics have sneered at Amelia, and openly exalted Rebecca along the lines of the Will to Live; but Thackeray's point surely is that Amelia was a fool, but that there is a certain sanative and antiseptic element in virtue by which even a fool manages to live longer than a knave. For after all, when Amelia and Becky meet at the end, Amelia has much less energy, but she has much more life. She is younger; she has not lost her power of happiness, her stalk is not broken; she could really, to use Thackeray's own metaphor, grow green again. But the energy of Becky is the energy of a dead woman."

"Pendennis" was Thackeray's next venture, and here, while "Vanity Fair" is called a novel without a hero, we have a novel with "nothing else but a hero." Not that he is especially heroic. Thackeray shows us a very ordinary young man—not only a man, but Man with a big M. The book has been called an epic on this account, and it has been said that Thackeray intended Arthur Pendennis to be a type and a symbol. Chesterton says, in his rather impressive way: "The love of Clive for Ethel is the love of Clive for Ethel, the love of Dobbin for Amelia is the love of Dobbin for Amelia, but the love of Arthur Pendennis for Miss Fotheringay is First Love. It is separated from all justifications or consequences; it is the veritable divine disease which seems a part of the very health of youth." But just as Pendennis himself is, so to say, commonplace, he is hedged about with types the most exaggerated that Thackeray drew.

This is that we may make no mistake about the influences at work in the world. But these characters cannot be summed up in a sentence or paragraph. Thackeray's method is discursive, and we have to search here and there for the truth. Chesterton contrasts this method of approach with the direct attack of Dickens. Speaking of Thackeray he says: "Even the bodily description of his characters are scattered and disseminated. The Dickens method is to say, 'Lord Jones, a tall man with a hooked nose and a white, pointed beard, entered the room.' Thackeray's method is to say, in Chapter I., 'Lord Jones, being very tall, had just knocked his head against the chandelier, and was in no very agreeable temper.' In Chapter VII., 'What jokes Jemina made about Sir Henry's bald head, Lord Jones' hooked nose,' and so on. In Chapter XXIII., 'Little Mr. Frizzle, the hairdresser, had pursued Jones for years, advising his Lordship to blacken artificially the white pointed beard that he wore.'" Again, Thackeray suggests things without quite saying them. That is so pleasant of him, so very early nineteenth century as to be almost eighteenth. He is not harsh and modern. Chesterton says of him: "When Thackeray wished to hint a truth which was just not true enough to bear his whole weight, his way was to wander off into similes and allegories which repeated and yet mocked the main story like derisive and dying echoes. If Thackeray wished to say that Jones drank too much without calling Jones a drunkard, then he would go into a long and dreary parenthesis, quoting Horace, humourously invoking Bacchus, talking about Bohemia and vineyards, and so come back to Jones, without having insulted him, but having, shall we say, sobered him. If he wished to say that Mrs. Jones had more trouble in her married life than she had had on her honeymoon; he did not brutally say that she was a disappointed woman, which perhaps was not true. He merely touched on it, and then trailed off into some epicurean song in prose about how youth must pass and roses fade, and by that avenue of universal autumn returns to Mrs. Jones,

having humanely hinted at her melancholy without in the least suggesting her despair." No novelist ever carried to such perfection as Thackeray the art of saying a thing without saying it. Human life is so densely sown with things that are true and yet may be misunderstood, that this is a very valuable faculty in a man telling tales about men. In Thackeray's later work he was a little apt to imitate himself, so to speak, and to attempt these parentheses which he somehow forgot to close.

"Esmond," without which, I suppose, any account of his work would be complete, was written during the high tide of his prosperity. It is in careful eighteenth century language; not a sentence in it but would have graced the Court of Queen Anne; yet, as I have heard said, over it breathes a peculiar conviction that Queen Anne is dead. I do not believe that a true Thackerayean loves Esmond. He admires it. Towards the end of his life Thackeray was asked to write "The Roundabout Papers," and he thoroughly enjoyed the job. His irrelevance, his parentheses, had full scope, and he seems to have forsaken even the shadow of cynicism, allowing himself only that satire of which lengthiness is the soul. After all, he had achieved his purpose, to show how the humblest substances is superior to the most alluring vanities; that it is the worldly who walk in fear, timid and solemn, and how it is the saints who are gay and careless.

In "Denis Duval," an unfinished novel, he shows that sweet breadth that was part of his nature; the optimism that was the very contrary of cynicism. All through his books we find that, though realising evil with the insight of so great a novelist, he knows the good to be eternal, and eternally the same. He does not believe much in progress; the good will never be much better. He is not a reformer; he is a peacemaker. He is too much imbued with the spirit of the past to expect or desire change, but he wants to reconcile all the elements of the present and make of them a healthy whole. The closest definition of his spirit would, I think, be this:

that he loved all fresh and beautiful things—like other romantics—but loved them with a deliberate recollection of their eternal recurrence and decay. He loved youth, but he did not love youth because it is young; he loved youth because it is old—one of the oldest things in the world. He believed in emancipation, but not very much in progress. His admiration for youth, the golden exultant youth of Clive Newcome or Harry Warrington, has nothing to do with any feeling about the future. Boys will be sailors, cries Mr. Rudyard Kipling; boys will found a new empire that shall girdle the globe. Boys will be rebels, cries Ibsen; they will bring their boisterous freedom to break down the barriers that separate us from truth and free creation.

For Thackeray the most important and solid prophecy about boys is that they "will be boys." And not only that, but we have got to make the best of them; and it is worth doing, not for any known gain, but that it fits in with the scheme of things. Thackeray had a large sympathy, a great heart, and a shrewd head, and he gave us books that will live for ever to vindicate what is innocent and sincere, and to deride what is ignoble, but so skilfully that he must carry all with him. He does not force the contrary minded to disagree with him—he is a teacher without being in the least a pedagogue.

Of Thackeray's private life it still appears almost an impertinence to find out. He lived in Kensington for the most part, first in a quaint old house in Young Street, and then in a larger one that he built for himself in the style of Queen Anne. This overlooks the Kensington Gardens, and was, I believe, a source of great pleasure to him. He was the centre of the literary coterie of his day, and I have heard from a very delightful old gentleman, his colleague on the staff of *Punch*, that he was the most witty and genial companion as well as the kindest of men. His purse was always open to those in need. He contributed to *Punch* for many years such weekly outpourings of wit as "Jeames' Diary,"

the "Snob Papers," and in his first and oldest friend, *Frazer's*
Magazine—since then, I think, defunct—he first brought out
"The Hoggarty Diamond," and "Barry Lyndon."

A PRESENT STUDENT.